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OCTOBER 9, 2009

## Liberty! featured at Tennessee History Festival

ELIZABETHTON – The scenes and sounds of *Liberty!*, the Official Outdoor Drama of Tennessee, will be featured during the Tennessee History Festival at Nashville's Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park on Oct. 23 and 24.

The long-running drama tells the stories of the men and women who settled America's first frontier and their drive to create the nation's first free and independent government, secure the largest private real estate transaction in history and to summon an army of citizen-soldiers to defend the cause of freedom in the darkest hours of the American Revolution.

*Liberty!* is presented annually in July at Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area in Elizabethton, on the very ground where the historic events occurred.



**James Robertson leads the formation of the Watauga Association, the nation's first free and independent government, in a scene from *Liberty!*, the Official Outdoor Drama of Tennessee.**

Created specially for the festival, a condensed half-hour version of the drama will be

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SYCAMORE SHOALS STATE HISTORIC AREA ★ ELIZABETHTON, TENNESSEE



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presented, with the cooperation and support of Tennessee State Parks, in the amphitheater at BCMSP on Fri., Oct. 23 and Sat., Oct. 24, beginning at 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. each day.

Several dignitaries are planning to join the 50-member troupe of actors for the performance, including Rep. Matthew Hill of Jonesborough, Unicoi Alderman Mark Ramsey, Unicoi County Mayor Greg Lynch, Speaker of the House of Representatives Kent Williams, Lt. Gov. Ron Ramsey and U.S. Rep. Phil Roe, all of whom have performed in the drama during its summer season.

*“Liberty!* is the best of home and I’m very proud for us to get the chance to share it with young people and friends in Middle Tennessee,” Williams said.

“We call this *the* American story and it is. Every Tennessean and every American should hear it, and rejoice in the hearing,” Roe said.



**Alyssa Kennedy, starring as Catherine ‘Bonny Kate’ Sherrill, wins the settlement shooting match in a scene from *Liberty!***

“It is a great honor for us to be able to perform in Nashville and we are all very excited about this chance,” said Nat Hyder, president of the Friends of Sycamore Shoals State Historic Area support group. “The drama is a splendid example of public/private partnership that enables government to better serve its citizens, and citizens to better utilize their government’s facilities,” Hyder said.

Many of the characters in the drama are well-known throughout the state for their efforts in settling and creating Tennessee, one of them especially so in the Nashville area.

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“We talk a great deal about James Robertson at Sycamore Shoals and in the drama. He and his family were integral to the formation of the Watauga Association in 1772, coming four years before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the association became the nation’s first attempt at a free and independent government,” said longtime drama producer and director Jon Ruetz.

“We have a scene in which we describe for our audiences the extraordinary pilgrimage, led by Robertson and Admiral John Donelson, that commenced in what is now Northeast Tennessee and ended on the banks of the Cumberland River where they planted their flag and established Fort Nashborough,” Ruetz said.

Once there, Robertson authored the Cumberland Compact, again establishing law and order for a new settlement just as he had the articles for the Watauga Association. “The total of his great contribution earned him the sobriquet ‘the Father of Tennessee.’ It is a profound thrill for us to essentially follow his pathway and proudly proclaim his memory and honor his accomplishments there in what is, thanks to him, our state capital,” Ruetz said.

Dr. Paul Cabinet portrays the tall, gallant leader in the production. “James Robertson was a tremendous figure in the story of Tennessee and the nation. We use both humor and his very own words to remind our audiences of just how important he was and the difficulties he overcame to make an indelible mark on our history. It is a personal honor to try to bring him to life onstage,” Cabinet said.

“It amazes me how these characters come together. It’s a natural camaraderie that

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we have and I think it's much like the closeness that our forebears enjoyed. All they had was each other," Gabinet said.

The actual Watauga Association document no longer survives but Robertson's words are gleaned from the Compact for the drama. "It stands to reason that two similar documents, written for the same purpose by the same man, would not be that different," Ruetz said. "And we'll be performing those words right off the parkway that bears his name."

*(Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park is located at 600 James Robertson Parkway. For more information about the festival, contact the park at [615] 741-5280 or visit the website at: <http://state.tn.us/environment/parks/Bicentennial/>. For more information about the drama, visit the websites at: <http://state.tn.us/environment/parks/SycamoreShoals/> and <http://www.liberty-drama.com/>).*



**The Bicentennial Capitol Mall State Park Amphitheater**



**The audience stands for the presentation of the colors prior to the beginning of Liberty! at Sycamore Shoals.**



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